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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
RANKING MEMBER OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE, CIVILIAN SECURITY,
MIGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC POLICY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC,
CENTRAL ASIA AND NONPROLIFERATION
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TACTICAL AIR AND
LAND FORCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS
SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

December 28, 2022

Admiral Linda L. Fagan
Commandant, United States Coast Guard
Department of Homeland Security
2703 Martin Luther King AVE SE
Washington, DC 20593

Dear Admiral Fagan,

As a veteran and Member of Congress, I have had the privilege of taking the oath to “support and defend the Constitution” many times throughout my time in public service. It is both an honor and tremendous responsibility to serve the American people through fulfilling this oath. Given your distinguished career in public service, I know you have taken this very same oath many times.

Unfortunately, your actions leading the United States Coast Guard since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak have transparently violated this oath and denied the Americans under your command their God-given and Constitutional rights. The genesis of the Republic you and I both work to defend every day was conceived as a haven for those seeking to freely express their faith. It saddens me that in the very institution charged with defending our coasts from homeland security threats, this inalienable commitment free exercise is under grievous threat.

Therefore, it is my expectation that, in accordance with your oath of service, you will immediately reinstate the seven cadets who were unceremoniously and unconstitutionally disenrolled from the Coast Guard Academy and discharged from the United States Coast Guard simply for exercising their religious liberties. To do otherwise would be not only a clear dereliction of your duty, but an unconscionable injustice to these young men and women. As you are undoubtedly aware, these cadets made their religious accommodation requests against the COVID-19 military vaccine mandate in accordance with established processes and were summarily denied without proper consideration under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the Constitution, basic science, or common sense.

For your convenience, please note the below names of these patriots whom you have denied proper exercise of their religion:

1/c Sophia Galdamez

1/c Jin Johnson

2/c Nate Aime

3/c Tabitha Aime

3/c Alexis Colasurdo

3/c Dayna Johnson

3/c A.J. Schurr

All seven of these young men and women represent the best and brightest of America. Serving in the Coast Guard as commissioned officers and Academy graduates was a major component of their individual American Dream. Some of these exceptional cadets are immigrants, some sons and daughters of immigrants, some first-generation college students, and all of them are “young men and women with sound bodies, stout hearts, and alert minds.”¹ They are all “strong in the resolve to be worthy of the traditions of commissioned officers in the United States Coast Guard, in the service of their country and humanity”². I insist that you invite them to rejoin the service and bring them back to New London to rejoin their classmates in time to begin the next academic and military training term in January.

The vaccine mandate was repealed for all of the Coast Guard Academy’s sister service academies in the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act signed into law by President Biden last week. Additionally, multiple lawsuits against the Coast Guard are pending which challenge the legality of the COVID vaccine mandate and/or of the Coast Guard’s denial of each of these cadets’ religious accommodation requests, including at least two cases in which the government has agreed to stay disciplinary and discharge proceedings against Coast Guard members until the mandate’s legislative future is certain. At least five federal courts have issued or affirmed an injunction and class action status to protect members of the Navy, Marines, Air Force, Space Force and Army respectively, from being discharged from their service or otherwise punished for not taking the vaccine due to religious objections, and there appears to be no reason courts will not ultimately require similar protections for these former Coast Guard Academy cadets.

I urge you not to wait for a legislative or court-ordered end to the vaccine mandate, but instead to do the right thing, right now and bring these willing young men and women back the Academy and to the service to which they have pledged their best efforts. I understand that the Air Force Academy, the Naval Academy, the Merchant Marine Academy and West Point

¹ United States Coast Guard Academy Mission statement - <https://uscga.edu/mission/>, accessed 12/13/2022.

² Ibid.

allowed cadets or midshipmen to continue their studies at their academies during the Fall of 2022, and continue to do so, despite those cadets being unvaccinated due to religious objections. There appears to be no reason the Coast Guard Academy cadets should be treated differently.

The Coast Guard's readiness to perform its vital missions for our Nation and our citizens requires a robust, well-trained, and cohesive workforce. The vaccine mandate has reduced military readiness across all the services, especially in the Coast Guard, and eroded morale and unit cohesion as important positions are now unfilled, recruiting is down, and public confidence in the military is rapidly declining. You can act now with a small gesture of goodwill toward restoring both the readiness and the reputation of the world's greatest coast guard, the United States Coast Guard, by bringing back these seven Coast Guard Academy cadets now in order that these students way continue their studies and service.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark E. Green". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark E. Green, MD
Member of Congress

cc:

Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary Of Homeland Security

Joseph V. Cuffari
Inspector General, Department of Homeland Security

Rear Admiral William Kelly
Superintendent, U.S. Coast Guard Academy

Vice Admiral Paul Thomas
Deputy Commandant for Mission Support

Rear Admiral Eric Jones
Deputy for Personnel Readiness

